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## **Telemedicine project introduced to 5 Howard County schools**

**Connection allows direct remote physician consultations**

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ELLICOTT CITY, Md. —Five Howard County schools will use telemedicine technology to boost health and student performance, officials announced Monday.

Sen. Barbara A. Mikulski, Howard County Executive Ken Ulman and Howard County Schools superintendent Dr. Renee Foose announced the ground-breaking initiative.

The officials, joined by Howard County Health Officer Dr. Maura Rossman, visited Phelps Luck Elementary School in Columbia to showcase the telemedicine equipment being connected to the Inter-County Broadband Network.

The connection will allow direct remote physician consultations between the school and the University of Maryland Children's Hospital in Baltimore.

County health officials said this is the first school-based wellness center using telemedicine in the state and is designed to improve access to health care for pupils, reduce absences due to medical conditions and improve educational outcomes.

"This is exactly the type of project we envisioned when we first conceived of the Inter-County Broadband Network," Ulman said. "When kids receive immediate treatment, they can go back to class and keep learning. We are using technology to keep kids healthier, and make sure they are reaching their full potential."

The Howard County Department of Health is running the program. Funding for the five high-tech telemedicine carts, from Care Clix, is coming from Howard County Government through a program designed to showcase new technology using the broadband network.

"Maryland broadband is bridging the digital divide and expanding access to jobs and opportunity," Mikulski said. "Providing school-based health services keeps kids in school, improves grades, enhances the overall health of students and saves money for families who don't have to miss work. With telemedicine made possible through broadband, Howard County schools will keep kids healthy, safe and learning while on the path to successful futures."

"Learning can't happen unless -- and until -- students are ready to learn," said Foose. "Telehealth keeps students in class, and helps them feel better sooner so they can focus on instruction. It will be a great boon for all students and families, and especially those with the greatest need."

Phelps Luck Elementary School in Columbia is one of five schools that were designated as Model Elementary Schools in Howard starting with this school year, which means students there are receiving world language instruction, full-day pre-kindergarten, and a host of other services to boost achievement.

Phelps Luck received certification from the Maryland State Department of Education earlier this month to serve as Maryland's first school-based wellness center using telemedicine. The four other schools -- Running Brook, Bryant Woods, Talbot Springs and Stevens Forest -- are expected to receive certification and telemedicine carts by October.

By using the equipment, school health specialists can connect in seconds directly to UMCH doctors, who will examine and diagnose sore throats, eye and ear infections, skin rashes, allergies and respiratory

illnesses. The services will be available at no cost to families; plans are to bill insurance providers after an initial phase-in period.

"The school-based telemedicine program provides the opportunity to keep our students healthy and in school in a cost-effective manner," Rossman said.

"Forward-thinking initiatives like this represent what we stand for at the University of Maryland Children's Hospital -- providing compassionate, specialized care to our area's youngest patients and their families," said Steven J. Czinn, MD, chair, Department of Pediatrics, University of Maryland School of Medicine. "We want the right patient in the right place at the right time, and telemedicine in the school setting can help us do that, whether it means getting a child back to class or to the Emergency Department."

"I am pleased at the partnership that is providing better services for our young people," said Dr. Calvin Ball, chair of the Howard County Council. "We need to continue to support programs like this. Let's push the envelope, on behalf of our next generation."